

**OH, MOTHER!**  
**A Sermon for the Festival of the Christian Home**  
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**St. Pauls United Church of Christ, Chicago**  
**May 10, 2009**

Texts: John 2: 1-11 / John 19:25-27 (at end of sermon)

Warm father God, hugging every child,  
feeling all the strains of human living,  
caring and forgiving, till we're reconciled.  
Hail and hosanna, warm father God.

Strong mother God, working night and day,  
planning all the wonders of creation; setting each equation, genius at play.  
Hail and hosanna, strong mother God. (From hymn "Bring Many Names.")

Strong, working, planning - Mother. Warm, hugging, feeling - Father. That hymn sure breaks down some of our tightly-held stereotypes and our expectations of mom and dad. And that is good. For that hymn is talking about God. The God who took on flesh and blood in Jesus Christ always seems to be in the business of breaking down our stereotypes and prejudices.

God is Father. And God is Mother. All in one. And one in all of us. And so, I wish you all a Happy Mother's Day! Moms who are also dads. And dads who are also moms. And two dads and the two moms. And you who have been the mothering presence in the lives of children who are not your own, and yet, in some wonderful ways, are your own. And you who bring the Mothering God to a world of people who sometimes feel like a motherless child. Happy Mother's Day to all who have been there for someone when they needed a mom.

Jesus had a mom. That is quite clear. Now for his dad, well, that is a little more, shall we say, theological. We know that his mom's name was Mary. And the Gospels say that she was very young when an angel visited her to tell her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would give birth to the Son of God. And she does. Mary's little boy child, Jesus Christ, is born. Mary had a baby, and his birth has become the Christmas Story, known throughout the world and down through the centuries. And Mary and the Infant Jesus together have been forever immortalized in Madonna paintings and statues.

But Mary shows up in the Gospels at other times in Jesus' life as well. One of the ones I like best is the time when she is with him at a wedding reception in Cana. She is SO much the mother in that story. And Jesus is SO much the young adult child.

It seems that the wine has run out. The horror of any party! Well, Mary goes to find Jesus and she tells him, "They are out of wine." Can't you just see Jesus rolling his eyes as he says, "Oh, mother! Of what concern is that to me? Or to you? Mom?!"

When I read this story, I can think of the times I felt like Jesus in the presence of my mother, who by the way, continued to call me Tommy. Even when I was past the age of 50. Now, since

Jesus' name in Hebrew is Yeshua or Yesu, Mary quite possibly responded to Jesus' lack of concern by saying, "Yeshy! Do it for your mother. Perform a miracle. I know you can do it."

What the Gospel actually says she says to the servants is, "Do what he tells you." She just assumes he will do what she wants him to do. And, you know what, he does. The Miracle at Cana. Water becomes wine. And all his friends at the party go, "Hey, look at what Yesh just did!"

And the people at the party now all believe in him. And his reputation spreads throughout the land - because of the one who had believed in him all along - his strong mother. Strong Mother God. Planning all the wonders of creation. Setting each equation. Genius at play. Mary. Mother.

In traditional theory and theology, God has almost always been Father God. While mother was assigned to the Church. The Mother Church. But, in actual practice, they are often all in one. God made known through the Church as strong, warm, working, feeling, planning, hugging, caring and forgiving, and welcoming. The Mother Church as God-with-us. The Mother Church as the embodiment of the God who was in Jesus Christ. The incarnation of real family values.

Not the perfect incarnation. By no means. Just as no mother is perfect. Yet, on this day that we celebrate as Mother's Day and the Festival of the Christian Home, it can be said that, for many, the church is the Christian Home. The place where people of all ages learn to grow up; where we all learn to share in household chores; where we see how to take care of others and experience being taken care of ourselves. Where we learn to trust. Where, in fact, miracles happen because there are people who believe in people. As Mary believed in Yeshua. The Church as the Christian Home. Mother.

When my 21-month-old granddaughter, Colleen, finds herself in a threatening situation, she says, "Mum." And she says it over and over again until she feels safe. Mum. Mum. Mum. Mum.

Strong mother God. Warm father God. Together in the church. Where those who have been threatened, beaten up and beaten down by the ways of the world can feel safe. Where people can take care of each other. And believe in each other. And perform miracles. And perform miracles that make the world a more loving, peaceful and just place to live. Out of the love created and nurtured here, we can live our lives out there as loving people. We can perform miracles. Just as Jesus performed a miracle for his mother who believed in him and knew he could do it. Mary, mother, the one who was there to hear his borning cry. The one who was there right up until it was finished.

On the cross at the end of his life, Jesus recalled her belief in him and he remembered his mother. As she stood right there with him. At the end he created with his words what would become a model for the church - a different kind of family. Jesus saw his mother standing there, and he saw the disciple that he loved standing nearby, and as one of his Seven Last Words, he said to his mother, "Woman here is your son." And to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And the disciple and Mary went home together.

Home. Strong Mother God. Strong Mother Church.

Mum. Mum. Mum. Mum. Mum.

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## TEXTS FOR SERMON

John 2: 1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

John 19:25-27

Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.